self-respecting art lover, took a passionate interest in studying the Roman ruins. Likewise, in his design for the Villa Madama, Raphael, not only shows his ability to use architectural structures and forms in a most original manner, but also gives proof of his skill in « dominating the nature » of the site. His influence was Bramante in the Nymphaeum of Genazzano. For this reason, Villa Madama represents a fundamental milestone for typological studies on the villa. Baldassare Peruzzi, whose cultural background widely differed from Raphael's, created a kind of surburban dwelling hitherto unknown in Roman circles, i.e. the Farnesina Palace, which reveals Tuscan influence in both the garden and the overall harmony of the forms.

In short, all the hills in the immediate environs of Rome and the surrounding countryside were soon dotted with villas and gardens commissioned by famous families and cardinals for the express purpose of exalting either a certain personage or a whole family. The commissions represented a special aspect in the history of the villa dating back to the 15th century when it was a custom for the lords of the time to correspond about their architectural ventures, expressing or requesting opinions, and even going so far as to trade artists and architects.

16th century Rome witnessed the construction of the Orti of Paolo III Farnese (1534-1549) on the Palatine Hill, the huge villa of Julius III beyond the Porta del Popolo which, on account of its great size, represented the stage of passing from the 16th to 17th centuries, and, in the Vatican, the Casino of Pius IV built by Pirro Ligorio (1558-1561). Yet it was the Quirinal Hill which became the most famous of all. Of the villas built on the Quirinal, we shall mention the one belonging to Cardinal Carafa in which his entourage resided and which Pope Paul III of the Farnese family frequently visited. Enlarged and adorned starting in 1559 thanks to Ippolito d'Este, the so-called « Cardinal from Ferrara, » the villa's numerous gardens were filled with various plants, barrel-shaped pergolas, statuary, and wooden structures, thus constituting, along with works by Gerolamo da Carpi and Giovanni Alberto Galvani, a precursor of the gardens of Villa d'Este.

The villas were conceived as delightful spots for retreats, especially designed, as were the palaces, to provide their owners with luxurious living. They were often huge complexes with sumptuous rooms, looking out upon well-groomed parks containing gardens, fountains, statues, and aviaries.

In addition to the artistry of the architectural gardeners, the Cinquecento garden required, more than anything else, the contribution of an architect with his vision of harmonious regularity. The terrain to be worked on was taken just as it was, i.e. the various degrees of unevenness were used as topographical elements to be fitted into the overall pattern. Obstacles such as uneven surfaces were once more overcome by means of terracing and wide-tread staircases, as the effect of monotony stemming from such solutions could easily be avoided by putting in fountains, flowerbeds, and small lawns. The entrances to the gardens consisted of gates which allowed the visitor to take in at a glance the villa and the park, or vice versa, according to the position of the whole complex in relation to the overall symmetry. The pathways, lined with cypress or pine trees, or else with holmoaks, box, juniper, and laurustine, were broken up by bas-reliefs, busts of famous men, or columns. Also, here and there at the intersections of the squared off hedges, there might be two-faced hermes and caryatids holding vases. Sculptures depicting every kind of mythological subject were employed as fountain ornaments, at first still in accordance with Quattrocento taste, i.e. as different kinds of modelled and carved shafts upon which the basins rested. The love for water was expressed in the most disparate ways, such as grottos, canals, fish pools, « scherzi d'acqua » (water games). It was employed all over: water was used in the same way as plants, i.e. it was considered something to be modelled as one wished.

It is thus the ancient Roman conception of the harmony binding beauty and nature which underlies the 16th century ideal of the villa. The villa represents a striving to achieve this harmony, yet before the Villa d'Este in Tivoli was built between 1550 and 1569, all these attempts had failed. Villa d'Este, the most complete model of garden landscaping, pointed out the artistic ideal to follow in order to attain that originality which throughout the Quattrocento artists had sought to create. And as a result of its uniqueness, its fame was carried down to the time of the construction of Versailles (1661). The flurry of admiration for the new Italian architectural gardening stemmed from the extraordinary blending of nature's multiple manifestations to architecture. And not only nature and architecture but also nature and sculpture, since water for the first time was treated as architecture (thanks to the use of newly-invented devices). The gardens embody the joining of the Humanistic culture of Ippolito d'Este to the archaeological passion of Pirro Ligorio. Ligorio was able to use just the proper dose of classical, i.e. in the planimetric and axial layout of the whole complex, while at the same time seeking to reach a personal idealization of Nature.

Ligorio's design strongly influenced the villas of Caprarola and Lante of Bagnaia (1566-1578) which were being built at the time by several artists who had also worked on Villa d'Este. They reveal a common use of allegorical themes, both on the inside and in the architectural and geometric garden landscaping.

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